

## Engaging with the research-to-practice challenge

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As practitioner-researchers working in real-world settings, we need to ensure that the studies we carry out in schools are sufficiently well-designed for there to be clear conclusions and implications for practice. As well as being a methodological issue, this is also an ethical one in that we should not be taking up participants' time for studies that, because of their design, cannot make a difference. We know that teachers' and parents' time is valuable, and it is worth reminding ourselves that children's time is valuable too.

Our aim here at *the International Journal of School & Educational Psychology (IJSEP)* is for our research to make a difference to children and families around the world. But how do we get from conducting carefully designed studies, writing, and reading research papers to making a difference to children's lives? The research–practice gap and how to bridge it is a significant concern for professions, no less within the educational field (e.g., Cook & Odom, 2013; Nuthall, 2004). This gap refers to the challenge of translating new research findings into cutting-edge practices that school psychologists and teachers can use in the classroom (e.g., De Corte, 2000; Slavin, 2002).

Both school psychology and the wider field of education are trying to catch up with the longer-standing, evidence-based practice focus of other professions such as medicine, allied health, and psychology. We know that meta-analyses and randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are viewed as the gold standard for providing the most robust research evidence that an intervention “works.” In carrying out applied research in schools though, it can be difficult to control random allocation to groups as we often have to work with pre-existing class groups. Similarly, it may be difficult to control who delivers an intervention as it is typically the class teacher. Without this control, we do not know if the intervention's apparent success was due to the enthusiasm and skill of the teacher who delivered it. This is an example of a threat to the internal validity of a study (Cook & Campbell, 1979), but it is not the only threat to internal validity in the quasi-experimental designs that are common in educational research.

Such threats limit how confident we can be about concluding that it was the intervention that caused the positive outcome. This means we have to read research papers actively and critically to identify what attempts were made to identify and control for threat factors before we decide whether we can generalize this intervention to our own setting and expect to see the same outcomes. And for qualitative research too, a parallel hierarchy of evidence (Daly et al., 2007) allows us to evaluate a study's confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability to our own setting (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Therefore, when we read a research paper, beyond our intrinsic personal interest in a topic to increase our skills, knowledge, and understanding, we also need to critically evaluate whether there is sufficient evidence to convince us to change our professional practice. But how many high-quality studies do we need to persuade us? And what systems are in place in our services to implement practice changes when translating new research findings to make a difference in the real world of our children? What is *IJSEP's* role for you as a school psychology practitioner? What changes as a result of your reading of *IJSEP*? I have posed a number of questions here that I hope will provide a useful context for reading and engaging with *IJSEP*.

## References:

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